Ministère
de l'Éducation,
du Loisir et du Sport
Québec

IMPROVING ACCESS FOR HANDICAPPED PERSONS TO SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT (MELS)

ACTION PLAN FOR 2006 AND 2006-2007

Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
December 2005

ISSN 1718-3383
ISBN 2-550-46254-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 3

Introduction 4

Purpose 6

Building Accessibility 7

On-site Reception Services 9

Telephone Reception Services 10

Ministry Publications 11

Web Site 12

Conclusion 13

Appendix A

Action to Be Taken Before April 2006 14

Appendix B

Action to Be Taken in 2006-2007 15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights* stipulates that every ministry must adopt, no later than December 17, 2005, an action plan to identify and reduce the barriers encountered by handicapped persons.

This plan must be prepared and published annually.

The Action Plan for 2006 and 2006-2007 proposes measures for adapting Ministère offices, on-site and telephone reception services and publications, as well as the MELS Web site, to the needs of handicapped persons.

INTRODUCTION

The *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights*[1] stipulates that every ministry or public agency employing at least 50 people, with the exception of educational institutions, and municipalities with fewer than 15 000 inhabitants, must adopt, no later than December 17, 2005, an action plan to identify and reduce barriers encountered by handicapped persons. The plan must be prepared and published annually.

"The action plans should include activities aimed at achieving the organization's mission and objectives. . . . The idea is to determine whether handicapped individuals would encounter obstacles in availing themselves of the organization's services or activities intended for the general public, its special activities for handicapped persons or its various management activities, and what could be done to reduce these obstacles."[2]

First, it is important to point out that the Ministère's Declaration of Services to the Public, which is intended to ensure quality services, pays special attention to services for handicapped persons.

To date, the Complaints Office has received no complaints about services offered to handicapped persons. Every year, however, complaints are filed with Aide financière aux études.

For its first action plan, the Ministère has decided to focus on the main services offered to the general public:

- information about education, recreation and sport
- statements of marks at the secondary level
- official copies of secondary school and college diplomas
- student financial assistance, including special provisions of the loans and bursaries program for handicapped persons and the Allowance for Special Needs Program providing access to the assistance and equipment handicapped persons need to complete their studies

1. According to page 11 of the *Guide à l'intention des ministères, des organismes publics et des municipalités en vue de la production de leur plan d'action à l'égard des personnes handicapées*, published by the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec in September 2005, a handicapped person is a person with an impairment resulting in a significant and persistent disability who is likely to encounter obstacles in the performance of everyday activities. [Translation]
2. *Guide à l'intention des ministères, des organismes publics et des municipalités en vue de la production de leur plan d'action à l'égard des personnes handicapées*, p. 6. [Translation]

The plan does not include, nor is it required to include, services offered by educational institutions or recreation or sports organizations, or the Ministère's involvement in these services. It is important to note that:

- The *Education Act* stipulates that educational services offered by school boards must be adapted to the needs and abilities of handicapped students; the Ministère provides school boards with the funding and support needed to adapt these services.

- The Ministère also offers subsidies to colleges and universities specifically for handicapped services: special equipment, aides, interpreters, translation of documents into Braille.

- The Ministère is collaborating with the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, agencies that promote and defend the rights of handicapped persons, and educational institutions on the improvement of services for handicapped persons: for example, the Groupe de concertation en adaptation scolaire, which helped develop the special education policy, the Comité québécois de concertation sur le braille, the Comité sur les services d'interprétation and the Comité sur la situation des étudiants ayant des incapacités dans les cégeps.

- The Ministère is also collaborating with the Régie du bâtiment du Québec on an initiative that consists in drawing up a list of architectural constraints in public buildings, including educational institutions.

- Lastly, the Ministère offers support programs for recreation and sports activities for handicapped persons.

The plan does not address the hiring and continued employment of handicapped persons, which are subject to other legislative provisions. Under these provisions, the Ministère must ensure that adapted services are available and make appropriate changes to work and rest areas, to take one example.

This first action plan covers the period from January 2006 to March 2007. In this way, subsequent plans will be in line with the fiscal year. It is based on the support documents published by the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec[3] and contains six headings:

- Purpose
- Building accessibility
- On-site reception services
- Telephone reception services
- Ministry publications
- Web site

3. *Guide à l'intention des ministères, des organismes publics et des municipalités en vue de la production de leur plan d'action à l'égard des personnes handicapées* and *Guide d'accessibilité et d'adaptation des services gouvernementaux*, Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, March 2005.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this first action plan is to reduce obstacles encountered by handicapped persons in accessing the main services offered by the Ministère to the public, taking into account the demand for such services, the Ministère's resources, building safety objectives and the possibility of collaborating with other agencies, especially with respect to building accessibility.

BUILDING ACCESSIBILITY

The Ministère has offices at 17 different locations in Québec. Their characteristics are as follows:

- Every building has either a direct entrance or an access ramp. The access ramp at the Laval office, however, does not have a handrail. It is unclear whether there are automatic doors at the regional offices in Québec City, Rouyn-Noranda, Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles, and on the floors of 1035, rue De La Chevrotière in Québec City that handicapped persons are likely to visit.

- There is a receptionist at every one of the Ministère's locations, either in the lobby or at the entrance to the Ministère's offices.

- The building directories do not always indicate the location of the Ministère's main reception area or services offered to the public. The Québec government's Programme d'identification visuelle prohibits using larger characters for these services, which might be helpful for persons with visual impairments. Some building owners also limit the use of lobby directories. In addition, directories often list names of departments rather than the services provided. There is also room for improvement in the use of signs inside the Ministère's offices.

- The use of pictograms to indicate the location of handicapped toilets, elevators or special elevators for people in wheelchairs, is not standardized.

- Where the Ministère's offices are not located on the main floor, elevators are available. It is unclear for the present whether the control panels in the elevators are low enough to be used by people in wheelchairs. In four cases, the panels do not provide indications in Braille, i.e. the Sept-Îles offices; the Bureau du greffe, rue Saint-Amable, Québec City; 150, boul. René-Lévesque Est in Québec City; and 1410, rue Stanley in Montréal. The elevators are equipped with audible signals in four buildings, i.e. Saguenay, Trois-Rivières, Montréal (rue Stanley) and Québec City (1035, rue De La Chevrotière).

- All the buildings in which the Ministère has offices, except the one in Sept-Îles, have handicapped toilets, but not necessarily on every floor. It should be determined whether the doors are automatic, whether the toilets and sinks are adapted to mobility impaired persons, including those in wheelchairs, and whether the faucets are activated automatically rather than mechanically.

Action to be taken before April 2006	Action to be taken in 2006-2007
Complete the survey of building accessibility: automatic doors, pictograms, fully equipped handicapped toilets, control panels located low enough in elevators.	
Contact building owners to notify them of the Ministère's desire to improve handicapped access (access ramps, pictograms, toilets, elevators) in order to determine whether other tenants are prepared to contribute their share of the cost. Request an estimate.	Improve handicapped access in accordance with the available budget and safety objectives. Begin by installing a handicapped toilet in the Sept-Îles office, making greater use of pictograms, installing Braille indications and audible signals in elevators and lowering the control panel in at least one elevator in each building.
Check the lobby directories and signs inside the Ministère's offices.	Rearrange the information in building directories and, as needed, on signs inside the Ministère's offices in order to clearly indicate the location of the Ministère's main reception area and services offered to the public.

ON-SITE RECEPTION SERVICES

Receptionists sometimes use simplified language to facilitate understanding or lip reading, or communicate in writing. They help handicapped persons find their way, make telephone calls to educational institutions or fill out forms. In the very rare cases in which sign language interpreters are used, they are "borrowed" from educational institutions by appointment.

An inventory of training needs conducted in 2004 after consultation with Ministère receptionists revealed no special needs with respect to dealing with handicapped persons.

Beneficiaries of student financial assistance have access to the Ministère's services in their educational institutions, which are required to offer services adapted to handicapped persons.

Action to be taken before April 2006	Action to be taken in 2006-2007
Prepare a data sheet to help equip receptionists to deal with handicapped persons.	Distribute the data sheet. Assess other training needs.

TELEPHONE RECEPTION SERVICES

Toll-free telephone lines are available to Aide financière aux études, Secrétariat au loisir et au sport, and Complaints Office clientele. Clients can either call these numbers or contact the Ministère's regional offices or the departments responsible for client services.

Telephone receptionists sometimes use simplified language. The Bell Relay Service is sometimes used either by the client or by a Ministère employee returning a client's call.

Beneficiaries of student financial assistance have access to the Ministère's services in their educational institutions, which are required to offer services adapted to handicapped persons. However, there is a special telephone number for contacting the team responsible for the Allowance for Special Needs program at Aide financière aux études.

The quality of services to handicapped persons could be improved by adding new toll-free telephone lines for ministry services. Reducing the number of locations at which these calls are received would limit the need to train front-line personnel answering calls from handicapped persons.

Action to be taken before April 2006	Action to be taken in 2006-2007
Add a toll-free education line for handicapped persons and the general public to the Bureau des plaintes line.	Set up a toll-free telephone line for the Allowance for Special Needs Program at Aide financière aux études.
Prepare a data sheet to help equip telephone receptionists to deal with handicapped persons.	Distribute the data sheet. Assess other training needs.

MINISTRY PUBLICATIONS

The Ministère produces more than 500 education publications annually, 60 per cent of which are intended for educators. About 30 per cent (orientation, statistical and research documents) are intended for the informed public. The remaining 10 per cent are addressed to a wider audience. The Ministère also produces documents related to recreation and sports.

Most documents are posted on the Web in Portable Document Format (PDF), which makes them easier to access. However, PDF is not compatible with the text-to-speech software used by persons with severe visual impairments.

Executive summaries are presented on the Ministère's Web site, and complete documents can be either viewed or downloaded. However, few ministry publications have an executive summary, and none are in simplified language for persons with severe mental or visual impairments.

A few documents have been produced in Braille, including the recreation assistance program for handicapped persons. A document about the student financial assistance program was produced in Braille in the 1990s. No one ever requested a copy, despite the fact that the document was officially launched and promoted in educational institutions. A similar audio document was prepared for the visually impaired. Despite promotional efforts, no one ever ordered the document. These documents have since been destroyed.

Action to be taken before April 2006	Action to be taken in 2006-2007
Ensure that all new ministry publications are posted in PDF on the Web site.	Ensure that all new publications have an executive summary, with the exception of shorter documents intended for the general public and publications intended for educators. Assess the ability of shorter documents and executive summaries to provide simplified information and propose corrective measures as needed. Assess the usefulness of producing executive summaries in simple language.

WEB SITE

Depending on their disability, handicapped persons experience a variety of difficulties accessing Web sites. The World Wide Web Consortium, as part of its Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), has proposed standards to facilitate access.

While WAI standards are not observed throughout the Ministère's Web site, several of its components, including the Aide financière aux études site and the most recent ministry projects, such as the back-to-school project, the Action Plan on Reading in School, the Wellness-Oriented School Program, the Homework Assistance Program and New Approaches, New Solutions, do.

The Ministère is planning a major reorganization of its Web site to comply with the online government initiative.

Action to be taken before April 2006	Action to be taken in 2006-2007
Ensure that all new projects on the Ministère's Web site observe WAI standards, e.g. information about registering for college or university courses.	When the Ministère's site is reorganized, ensure that the entire site observes WAI standards.

Conclusion

With the exception of student financial assistance, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport offers few services directly to the public. However, as indicated in its Declaration of Services to the Public, it strives to ensure quality services for handicapped persons and the general public.

The Ministère's services are for the most part already accessible to handicapped persons and no complaints have been received by the Complaints Office. Upon analysis, however, a few shortcomings have been identified and the first corrective measures will be taken in the coming months and in the next fiscal year. The development of the 2007-2008 action plan will be an opportunity to evaluate these measures and to continue offering high-quality services.

APPENDIX A

Action to Be Taken Before April 2006

- ✓ Complete the survey of building accessibility: automatic doors, pictograms, fully equipped handicapped toilets, control panels located low enough in elevators.
- ✓ Contact building owners to notify them of the Ministère's desire to improve handicapped access (access ramps, pictograms, toilets, elevators) in order to determine whether other tenants are prepared to contribute their share of the cost. Request an estimate.
- ✓ Check the lobby directories and signs inside the Ministère's offices.
- ✓ Prepare a data sheet to sensitize receptionists and help them adapt to any special needs of handicapped persons.
- ✓ Add a toll-free education line for handicapped persons and the general public to the Complaints Office line.
- ✓ Prepare a data sheet to sensitize telephone receptionists and help them adapt to any special needs of handicapped persons.
- ✓ Ensure that all new ministry publications are posted in PDF on the Web site.
- ✓ Ensure that all new projects on the Ministère's Web site observe WAI standards, e.g. information about registering in college or university courses.

APPENDIX B

Action to Be Taken in 2006-2007

- ✓ Improve handicapped access in accordance with the available budget and safety objectives. Begin by installing a handicapped toilet in the Sept-Îles office, making greater use of pictograms, installing Braille indications and audible signals in elevators and lowering the control panel in at least one elevator in each building.

- ✓ Rearrange the information in building directories and, as needed, on signs inside the Ministère's offices in order to clearly indicate the location of the Ministère's main reception area and services offered to the public.

- ✓ Distribute a data sheet to sensitize receptionists and help them adapt to any special needs of handicapped persons. Assess other training needs.

- ✓ Set up a toll-free telephone line for the Allowance for Special Needs Program at Aide financière aux études.

- ✓ Distribute a data sheet to sensitize telephone receptionists and help them adapt to any special needs of handicapped persons. Assess other training needs.

- ✓ Ensure that all new ministry publications have an executive summary, with the exception of shorter documents intended for the general public and publications intended for educators.

- ✓ Assess the ability of shorter documents and executive summaries to provide simplified information and propose corrective measures as needed.

- ✓ Assess the usefulness of producing executive summaries in simplified language.

- ✓ When the Ministère's site is reorganized, ensure that the entire site observes WAI standards.